

Fairfield Ledger
Fairfield, IA
Circ. 3225
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7/13/2005
42728



172-108 Several 'Great Places' proposals submitted from area

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The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs has received several proposals from Fairfield-area groups wanting to take part in the Iowa Great Places initiative, a program intended to help communities develop their assets and promote themselves as good places to visit and live.

Cultural affairs director Anita Walker said the state received proposals from Fairfield, Maharishi Vedic City and the Villages of Van Buren, as well as a proposal to develop southern Iowa's Historic Hills Corridor, which includes Van Buren County.

The state will pick three pilot projects and try to help those com-

munities reach the goals outlined in their proposals.

Six proposals either come from or affect Jefferson and Van Buren counties.

- **Maasdam Barns:** Mark Shafer, chairman of the Jefferson County Historic Preservation Commission and a teacher at Fairfield High School, submitted a proposal for the barns on the old Maasdam Farmstead south of town. Shafer said the barns, which are linked to the Loudon Machinery Company and other major players in Fairfield's history, could be restored and developed into an attraction.

- **Brain Belt:** Burt Chojnowski, president of the Fairfield Entrepreneurial Association, submitted a proposal to create "Brain Belt" communities in Iowa, encouraging the growth of startup businesses.

- **Creative Economy Theme Park:** Chojnowski also proposed turning Fairfield into a "Creative Economy Theme Park," combining new digital media businesses with Fairfield's creative community to expand the economy and improve quality of life.

- **Vedic City:** Bob Wynne, mayor of Maharishi Vedic City, submitted a plan to continue developing the city with help from the Great Places program.

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- **Van Buren County:** Stacey Glandon, executive director of the Villages of Van Buren, submitted a proposal outlining the county's long-term goals, including the development of an Iowa Forest Heritage Center and a countywide trail system.

- **Historic Hills Corridor:** Dennis Ryan, chairman of the Chariton Valley Transportation Planning Affiliation, proposed working to "put the pieces ... together" in the Historic Hills Corridor, which includes Appanoose, Clark, Davis,

Decatur, Lucas, Monroe, Van Buren, Wapello and Wayne counties.

Walker said her department received 145 proposals — or invitations, as the state is calling them — from 91 counties.

The state will assign coaches to each of the cities or groups that submitted proposals to discuss their goals, Walker said, so even places that aren't picked as one of the three pilot locations will benefit from the process.

All 145 invitations can be viewed online at iowagreatplaces.gov.